

LONG ISLAND FORUM



Rock Hall in Lawrence which was built by Joseph Josiah Martin in 1767 and which is now owned and maintained by the Town of Hempstead as a museum. From a watercolor by Cyril A. Lewis.

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AUGUST 1961

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LONG ISLAND FORUM

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Readers' Forum

Trouble About A Pig

(From the Minutes of the Town of Newtown 1656-90.)

The deposition of Richard fidoe aged about 37 yeare or there about decleareth as follow

this deponent decleareth that Goody wood Came to my house to come and see a pigg that wass hurt and bitt about the neck in to or three holls In soe the sa; Goody Wood desire this deponent and thomas pettit to Goe with her up to Richard smith. house: soe when wee Came to the said smith hou. . Goody wood said you have hurt one of my piggs then Richard smith replied he had not hurt him but his dogg gave him a pinch.

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The Bethpage Purchase

Part I

Thomas Powell, Yeoman

NEWLY SCRAPED and coated with grease and tar, a merchantman, four weeks out from Barbados, sailed one day into Huntington Harbor. The year was 1653.

Standing in the ratlines, the captain's twelve-year-old son and namesake, Thomas Powell, saw a wooded valley stretching south from the harbor with a few rude houses on the eastern side. Straight ahead the bay ended in three small rivers and along the bank of one stood the Indian village, Martinne-houck, consisting of thirty or more thatched wigwams.

The merchantman anchored and the boy's father (possibly the same Thomas Powell sent to Barbados in 1635 by the Earl of Carlisle who had received the island by royal grant from Charles I) rowed ashore in the jolly-boat for a visit with an old London friend, Thomas Matthews. Later, the boy learned that he had been apprenticed to Matthews who was a cordwainer, coastwise ship-owner, and perhaps the first tradesman in Huntington.

One can imagine the mixed feelings of a twelve-year-old boy left to his own devices in a new world. Over the horizon sailed the old life: the crew of cutthroats; the smell of rum and sack in the hold; the back-breaking labor of days on board; the diet of salted fish, salted meat, served cold with a little vinegar; the occasional musty apple or helping of rancid butter; the heated wine mixed with Spanish soap; given as an emetic whenever food poisoning occurred. Yet, aside from these discomforts, there would be a memory of, and a boyish longing for, the farm horses, sheep and hogs in their pens on the open deck, the clean-smelling cooper's supplies or shingles and planks carried

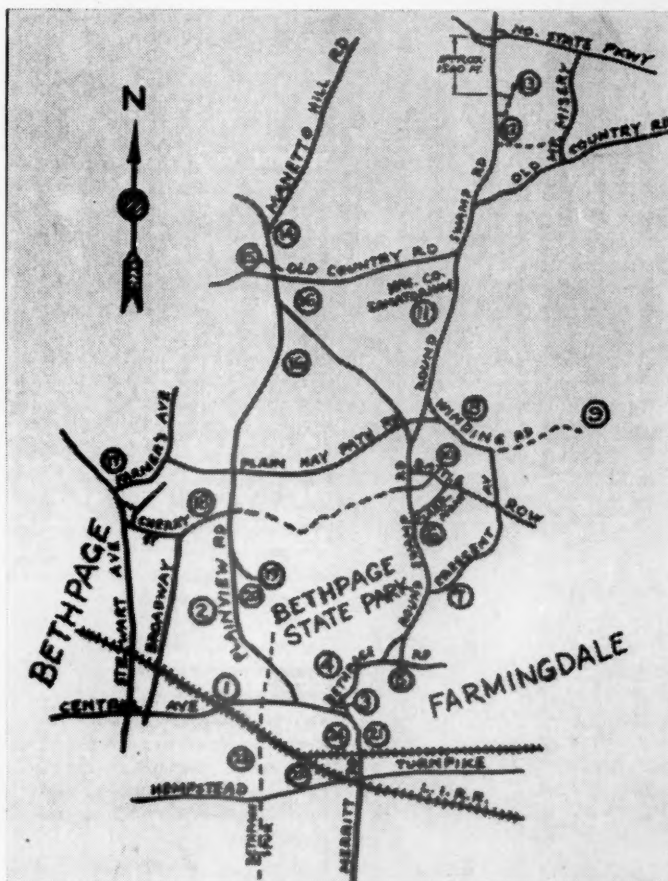
Alonzo and Iris Gibbs

on the return voyage to the islands.

Obediently, however, he accepted his apprenticeship and began to grow with the town. Among his duties was to be herdboys to his master's cows which were pastured on common land called East Fields (later Old Fields) and West Field (West Neck) during the day and confined in a guarded stockade at the Town Spot during the night. He learned that each owner had his own registered mark, such as "two notches and a half-penny in the off ear," by which his own neat-cattle could be recognized. The boy also began to fashion boots of Spanish goat-skin, called cordwain, and to sail on his master's coastwise

ship to Flushing and New Amsterdam (the city became New York in 1664). There he no doubt saw the fort and the governor's house, the windmills of the city, the three-story houses with their stepped gable roofs, gathered beyond the wooden pilings of the wharves. These trips opened up to him the ways of commerce.

But more important, Matthews was a shoemaker. Cobblers of the 16th century took care of the children of a community when parents were working in the fields. Thus the shop became a school and the journeyman a teacher of sorts. Very probably Matthews educated young Thomas, for by twenty he could read and write, a fact that



alone must have set him apart—in most American towns of that period only one child in seventy was literate.

Matthews, too, under the rules of an apprenticeship, provided all clothing. Although Charles II (1660-1685) was soon to make foppish French costumes fashionable at court, a simple, puritanical dress continued in America. A country lad like Thomas Powell must have dressed in an enduring cloth like osnaburg. While working in the shop he probably wore an open shirt tucked into long pantaloons reaching to his feet. But in the fields or woods leather breeches and hand-knitted, knee-length woolen stockings served best. Summer, of course, meant going bare-footed.

About this time, 1652, Quakerism became a movement, although George Fox, its founder, had begun to preach as early as 1647. We must remember that the Quaker was then considered a radical. New England authorities fined and jailed captains for carrying members of this sect aboard their vessels, and some Quakers in Boston lost their ears or were hanged. It may be that Thomas' father had brought this new faith to him from Barbados, where the movement was so strong that Fox, himself, visited and preached there on his way to America in 1671; but more likely young Thomas was converted in the homes of those Friends who had "followed the light within" to Long Island in an attempt to escape from the religious bigotry of New England.

Sometimes, as in Quakerism, a radical ideology is accompanied by an extreme conservatism in way of life. We find, therefore, that George Fox was stoned in the streets for his ideas, while Thomas Powell, a devout Friend, was embraced, for a time at least, by a town that admired his prudent conduct. The Quaker merchant with his single standard of business—

(Continued on page 186)



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Skaters and Scholars

Chester G. Osborne

LATE ONE afternoon in January, 1835, young William Carman sat down at his desk in Bellport. His regular classes at the new Academy were over for the day; now he had time for a letter or two. In a fairly readable script he began a note to his friend Egbert Tangier Smith. He intended to write that he was enjoying very good health, and to inquire about Egbert, but as his pen reached the words "very good . . ." his schoolmate William J. Weeks strode into the room and greeted him boisterously.

Carman glanced up, either in surprise or annoyance, and he never did write the word "health." Weeks asked about the letter; learning that it was to Egbert, he asked to be remembered. Then as Carman's pen scratched away, Weeks decided to send him own remembrance with a postscript. This he did, in a fine, flowing hand that would be a credit to a master penman today.

Both the letter and the postscript have been found among the Tangier Smith Papers. It was a lucky find for they are informative and interesting, and were written during the second school year of Bellport's famous old Academy. Carman's letter tells about his studies in a good-humored style though there is a hint of competition with Egbert. Weeks' postscript has humor, too, though it is of a rather grisly sort!

This is Carman's letter just as he spelled it out:

"Bellport Academy
Jan 14th 1835

Wednesday afternoon

Dear Sir

I have taken my pen in hand to address you with a few lines explaining to you that I am now enjoying very good — and am in hopes to find you the same the reason that I have not wrote before



The Bellport Academy from an old Photo Lent by the Bellport Memorial Library.

is I have expected a letter from you every day and am still in hopes you will write. While I am now writing Wm. J. Weeks steps up and wishes me to give his respectes to you and his other old friends of South Hampton. He and myself are now making great progress in Lattin Reader we are now nearly half through and intend to enter in Virgil in a few days. We have taken up the pleasant study of philosophy Arithmetic grammar and parsing. We consider ourselves almost perfect in lattin Grammar or at least we can compair Bonus we will give you an example Bonus Melior Optimus likewise we can conjugate the verb Lego and several other lattin words we are now nearly through the Arithmetic or at least so far that we could see through if the leaves were perforated with several holes In our study of philosophy we have found that boddies are at-

tracted equally by each other according to the quantity of matter by this reason we are in hopes you will be attracted up here by the Academy there being so much more matter in it than in your boddie. Give my respectes to Mr. Rogers the person that attended the examination of my Shoes last winter when I was down there tell him they would suffer a more close examination at the present day for they have been at the Academy ever since likewise have been rubed rubed with the blacking brush I have nothing more to say but should be very much pleased to see you Wm Weeks wishes to add a poscript

Yours affectionate
Wm Carman"

Before we quote Weeks' postscript, we should say something about the boys. Egbert, to whom Carman wrote, was about thirteen years old at the time, and was

studying at Southampton. His father, William "Point Billy" Smith, was making every effort to insure that the boy would be well-educated, and had sent him to school in Moriches in 1829, to Miller's Place in 1830, East Hampton in 1832, "Belleville Academy" in 1834, and would later send him to Southampton and Miller's Place again and finally to Princeton!

Egbert's mother was the former Hannah Carman so it is more than likely that he and William Carman were cousins. We can find out a little more of both boys—and get a hint of inter-family rivalry—from a letter written by Egbert's father a few years later when Egbert was at Princeton:

"My Dear Egbert

I have received a Letter from you. . . You write that you have received a letter from William Carman and that he likes college life well . . . This is a very Excelent sign it is a sign that he is improving and as it is his dependance in his future life he will no doubt come out of college a shining student . . . I am sorry to hear that you are not of the same opinion. . ."

In another letter, "Point Billy" was even more specific in his advice: "Should you be in the Habit of Writing to William Carman which is a Thing well Enough I said be Careful not to Mention any Thing Respecting Princeton College as it Respects your not Liking the place, Faculty or people as he (Carman) will Write home and all That is Said will be talked of in this neighborhood. . ."

Now for the postscript by William Weeks, with its "sick" humor of the early nineteenth century:

"E T Smith

Dear Sir

I now take this opportunity of a postscript by Mr Carman's letter, which I hope will be agreeable. I suppose he has told you about our studies and the Academy but he has said nothing about our scholars

who number between 30 and 40 and are increasing every day. The bay is frozen over so that all communication between here and N. York has ceased. There is an ice boat which bravely over the ice at the rate of 60 miles an hour or I mile a minute. The wind blew so very heavy the other day, that a person who was sailing in her had his breath taken away by the velocity in which he was moving. His breath was again restored by means of the Air Pump, he received no other injury. The person's name was Peter Penobscot, perhaps you are not acquainted with the gentleman. The skating is fine. It has never been better since the Christian Era. I have nothing more to say only that two singular adventures happened a few days since in this place. A person while skating on the bay fell in an air-hole and went all under the water, and came out again perfectly dry, and without the least injury, another while in the same business fell in an airhole where the water was a — knee deep, he was going with such velocity that he cut both legs square off. The surgeon being sent for soon came but he was in such a hurry at his arrival that he put the legs on wrong side before. The person is now at a stand which way to walk whether backward or a head. Give my respects to all inquiring friends.

Yours &c
Wm. J. Weeks

Bellport
Ja— 15th

Paid 10c

To: Master Egbert T Smith
Care of Mr Herrick
Southampton
L. I."

From the archives of Bellport Memorial Library we learn that "Bell Port Classical Institute" was built in 1833 and remained in use until 1902 when the students moved to a new school on Station Road.

Pelletreau's history contains excellent sketches of William J. Weeks and his father, James; all we can add to our summary is that men were men in those days!

James Huggins Weeks was born in New York in 1798 and at an early age moved to Oyster Bay where he went to school. In 1818 he married Susan Jones, a descendant of Major Thomas Jones. (Egbert had a cousin, William Sidney Smith, who married into the same family.) Major Jones was the first settler at Fortneck, Queens County. James later moved to Yaphank; he purchased a tract of woodland from what was once part of the Tangier Smith estate and set up a cordwood industry. At that time, wood could be sent to New York only by sailing vessel, which was a slow and expensive method. Seeking to improve upon this, he first helped to promote the railroad, later became a director, and finally in 1847 rose to president. He was al-

(Continued on page 179)

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Shooting Stars Over Jones Beach

Julian Denton Smith

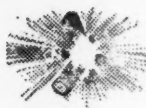
A BEACH with its darkness, its low horizons and its near-solitude is a wonderful place to star-gaze. Jones beach is particularly excellent for viewing the "Perseid Showers" — the annual shooting star display of the second week in August. It is the biggest star show of the year.

I enjoy perching myself on the tip-top of a high sand dune to watch the night go by. From such a location fully 99 44/100% of the sky is visible. A glow spreads out from the northwest — the reflection of the city lights. Shore lights twinkle and sparkle. On the ocean a couple of fishing boats show their running lights. Parkway lights stretch off into the distance like a string of shining beads. Over all a soft illumination sifts down from the stars.

The actual amount of starlight always amazes me. There is not enough to read a newspaper, but the breakers are clearly seen. The beach is a deep sullen gray and anyone walking is a darker shade of gray. As star-gazing hours slip away, a person's eyes become accustomed to the starlight and unexpected objects show up — shells on the sand become white, beach grass exhibits a bit of shine on the leaves, and a glowing cigarette appears as big as a stop light.

I like to climb one of the higher dunes to the east of Parking Field No. 9, the East Overlook, and spread my blanket on the grassless spot at the top of the dune. All dunes seem to have a bald top which makes an ideal place for sunbathing in the day, a nook completely hedged in by beach grass.

If my dune is high enough and the tide falls low enough, I will see Sandy Hook Light blinking in the southwest. Fire Island flashes brilliantly directly to the east. It would



be interesting some time to work out the angles of those two lights at the Jones Beach Tower and then check some of the maps that look out of line and questionable.

As well as I know the Jones Beach shore, I get lost at night. Nothing looks at all familiar after dark. Only silhouettes are distinguishable. Try to tell where you are by the outline of a sand hill or the rounded fullness of a clump of bushes! I usually mark the most desirable dune during the day by sticking a timber of some sort near the top. This will show up at night to act as a guide.

Beach nights in early August are likely to be the same warm nights we enjoyed in July. Later in the month the nights become chilly and cool along the water no matter how hot the day has been. Swim trunks, a light jacket and a pair of shoes are enough in the way of clothing. I pack a beach towel as I am in and out of the water trying to keep awake during the very tiny hours of the morning. Shoes are necessary against broken glass.

A few star-gazers appear with field glasses and flashlights. I can never bring my binoculars into play fast enough to catch falling stars, so leave them in the car. I do not use a flashlight while star-gazing because my eyes are so very slow recovering from the sudden glare at a time when I want them for really acute night work.

Up to midnight the display of shooting stars in the Perseid showers is meager—maybe an average of one a minute. After twelve o'clock they increase in numbers up to four or five a minute and perhaps higher in the hour before day-

break. That last, final hour seems to be the best one to view the show in the sky.

There is a reason for this time element. Up to midnight we are on the trailing side of the earth as it spins while moving along its path around the sun. After midnight we come up on the leading side of the earth and shooting stars are approaching us directly and not catching up with us as before twelve. So we see many more shooting stars after midnight.

My almanac has this note in the column entitled "Aspects, Holidays, Heights of High Water, Weather, etc." for August 10, 1961, a Thursday — "Watch for Shooting Stars." That dates the maximum display of this year. Very fortunately the night will be black and dark with no moon for the same almanac sets up a new moon on the very next night, August 11. How delightful it would be if we could have a cloudless sky! I do not trust my almanac to come up with any such delicate and precise forecasting.

Most of the shooting stars will streak our way from the constellation called Perseus which will be in the northeastern sky and will slowly move to overhead by daybreak. From Perseus we get the name for this annual display of shooting stars — the Perseid Showers. The stars crisscross in the sky. They make drooping curves and arcs in varying degrees. Some are ever so faint and other show brightly.

I should like to see a fireball. It is a shooting star so bright that it casts shadows. It is probably of yellowish light because it would be near the earth — more distant shooting stars are bluish. The density of the atmosphere seems to regulate the color of shooting stars.

I do not know that there is entire agreement concerning

what brings these shooting stars to us during the second week in August. It seems to have been going on forever. There are other nights of shooting stars but the summer Perseid is always on schedule without a hitch.

Shooting stars are meteors — fragments of matter in the sky that burn from friction in the earth's atmosphere. They become incandescent when slightly more than fifty miles from the earth and quickly lose weight and speed to burn out in a few seconds about forty miles above the earth. When first observed, a shooting star is making along at the rate of twenty miles a second — a solid piece of matter tearing through space. The meteor is completely consumed when it disappears from sight.

Meteorites are shooting stars that do not burn out in their flight through our atmosphere. They strike the earth. They are masses of stone or metal — one or the other — I do not think in combination. One of the ancient Biblical kings referred to his chunk of meteorite as "black iron of heaven" and considered it a treasure on a par with his gold.

A meteorite may be as small as a dime or weighed by the ton. All of us have heard of the huge one that fell years ago in what is now Arizona. It is estimated to have weighed more than 12,000 tons. Scientists say it fell onto the earth about 50,000 years ago. The force of the impact is still apparent in a crater four-fifths of a mile across and 570 feet deep.

I'll be satisfied with a fireball; meteorites can go elsewhere!

There are noises and sounds of beach life throughout an August night. The surf murmurs or rages according to its liking. Every once in a while a small bird chirps as though having a bad dream, or in waking, realizes its hunger. An owl may set up a hoot in a pine thicket. A wisp of song can carry all the way from the Marine Theatre and very

occasionally a snatch of music loses itself back at the roller skating rink.

The most startling and disconcerting racket comes from a black-crowned night heron flying overhead unseen and silently. He lets loose with a sudden bloody, unearthly, crazy "Quark!" His salutation directly over your head is enough to make you mend the error of your ways forthwith or prepare to die!

Do not be surprised if a spider or some kind of leggy insect meanders across your skin — the beach crawls with unfamiliar night things. A rabbit may hop up beside you. He might want to smell the salt on your body. There are

no snakes on Jones Beach; at least I have not seen one for the last fifteen years.

I believe it is worth losing some sleep to see shooting stars all over the sky. If not a single star fell, the vast view of the heavens would still be worth the effort. When stargazing I like to recall the marvelous sentence Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote — "If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown."

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Old Miller Place Academy

AN EDUCATIONAL landmark in Brookhaven town a hundred years ago was the Miller Place Academy, which was organized and built in 1834.

A meeting of the residents of Miller Place was held on April 8, 1834, "For the purpose of taking into consideration the building of an academy in this village." At that meeting a committee was appointed to circulate a subscription paper. The men Samuel Hopkins, Charles Miller, Conklin Davis and Thomas Helme. A meeting held on May 17 of the same year appointed a building committee consisting of Nathaniel Miller, Thomas Helme, Joel Brown, Charles Miller, Samuel Hopkins, Charles Woodhull and Horace Hudson.

Fifty six shares were subscribed at a value of \$25 each, and each shareholder had as many votes as he held shares. The shares were mostly taken by the people of the village, but among the original stockholders appear the name of Thomas S. Strong, Benjamin Strong and Samuel Thompson of Setauket, Caleb and Albert Woodhull of New York City, John Roe of Patchogue, and Nathaniel Tuthill of Greenport.

The building committee, who were authorized to "circulate a subscription paper, employ workmen to build an academy, pay off the bills and complete the work," promptly went to work and engaged the services of Isaac Hudson of Middle Island to erect a two story building at a cost of \$1600. Mr. Hudson also built the Bellport Academy in 1834 and the Middle Island Presbyterian church in 1837. The Miller Place Academy was completed in seven months and school opened on November 1, 1834, with Frederick Jones as the first principal.

The Academy was the pride of the residents of Miller Place, for they had invested

Thomas R. Bayles
not only their money, but also their hearts in the enterprise, and their reward came from seeing their young people well educated for those years. The need for such an institution must have been appreciated by the residents of the surrounding villages, and when the second term opened in 1835 the students included Joel L. Smith and Moses R. Smith of Smithtown, and Floyd T. Floyd of Mastic.

Colonel Charles Woodhull and his wife "Aunt Polly" who was a noted housekeeper, boarded five boys at their hospitable home across the road from the Academy. Their only son, Merrit, was a student at the school, and in later years became a steamboat captain on the run from New York to Savannah, Ga. Two brothers of the colonel were prominent in New York. They were Albert and Caleb Woodhull, and Caleb was at that time Mayor of the city of New York.

During the thirty-four years of its operation the number of pupils attending the Academy was between 25 and 60. Tuition was \$10 per term, and the out of town boys

were boarded in local homes for \$1.50 a week.

The principals of the Academy were mostly young college men and their terms of service were usually not very long, although J. Bryan Marshall taught for ten years.

In 1839, \$100 was appropriated "to purchase chemicals, philosophical and mathematical instruments." The trustees at the annual meeting in 1859 decided that "algebra, navigation and surveying shall be included with the languages for \$10 per term."

The roll of students included the names of many who in later years became prominent in Suffolk County. Among them was James H. Tuthill, county judge and surrogate for ten years; of whom his biographer says, "James won distinction in the Miller Place Academy, where he studied for three years." Benjamin K. Bayne, recognized as the father of the Suffolk County bar; Edward L. Gerard of Yaphank, a businessman; Charles S. Havens, for six years Supervisor of Brookhaven town; Dr. Charles S. Robert and John S. Robert of



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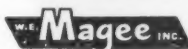
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Orlando Hand of Bridgehampton was a student at the Academy in 1839, when he was thirteen years old, and a letter written by him to the "Brooklyn Daily Times" in 1907 at the age of 81, says: "I was taken by my father in 1839 at the age of thirteen to Miller Place and left under the kindly Christian roof of Colonel Charles Woodhull. His home was a hospitable one and sheltered five students, who all slept in one room in the attic, and it was a jolly winter. The Colonel's wife, Aunt Polly, ruled her household wisely and well. Southampton town had a student there the winter I was there, who was the late Capt. Peter R. Rose of North Sea, who was one of the most successful whaling captains ever produced, or that ever trod a quarterdeck."

As public schools improved, the usefulness of the Academy passed, and the winter of 1867-68 was the last term for the school. During the early part of the present century the lower room of the building was used as a public school and the upper room for holding religious services. The building is still in active service as a public library.

Wanted: Unusual Trees

Mr. George H. Peters, whose address is 175 East Seaman Avenue, Freeport, is working on the ten-year supplement to the first edition of "The Trees of Long Island," sponsored by the Long Island Horticultural Society:

"If any of your readers," he writes us, "are familiar with large, historic or unusual trees (on the

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Skaters and Scholars

(Continued from page 174)

so a trustee of Brookhaven Town.

James was still extremely vigorous when he neared his seventieth year. One evening in 1866 there came a knock at his door. His wife opened it. There stood four men, "two of whom with faces disguised rushed in, one pointing a pistol at him, the other pointing a similar weapon at his wife and both demanding money or their lives. Without a moment's hesitation Mr. Weeks grasped the pistol arm of the nearest ruffian, throwing him violently backward, and at the same time grappling with the other, whom he partially forced through the sash. A moment afterward he hurled them out of the door, the first one falling heavily backward as he tripped on the stoop. . . . The four, it is recorded, "fled precipitately."

William Jones Weeks was just as virile as his father. Though there is no record of him tossing burglars through windows and doors with great nonchalance, he used his winter vacation from Yale in 1841 in a manner worthy of a champion: he set out on a walk from New Haven to Boston. The deep snows caused him no trouble; he covered the 140 miles in three days. Still rarin' to go, he visited various landmarks, turned around and set out for Providence, Rhode Island. Carry-

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ing a twelve-pound valise, he covered the least thirty-five miles in nine hours!

He started a boat club at Yale, the origin, says Pelletreau, "of the Yale Navy," and may well have been the founder of intercollegiate aquatic sports. He was an excellent surveyor, and settled boundary differences between Oyster Bay and Huntington by erecting monuments. In addition, he held many civic offices such as justice of the peace. He collected animal specimens for the Long Island Historical Society, and was adept in taxidermy. An expert in bee culture, in 1860 he reported to the "Scientific American" the method by which bees construct their hexagonal cells. He was also a pioneer in cranberry raising, and an officer in the county agricultural society.

In his seventies, he learned to ride a bicycle and toured through remote parts of Long Island. His postscript to his friend Carman's letter with its jokes about skaters finds an echo in this fact: "From his youth up to the last year of his life (he died in 1897 at age 76) he was an enthusiastic skater." He could cut eagles and edges on the ice with great dexterity, inscribe capital and small letters singly or in combination, and (still on ice!) write the "Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments . . . with engraving-like accuracy."

"This faculty," Pelletreau observes soberly, "he largely

Readers' Forum

Springfield Dock

In reference to "Four Questions," on page 139 of the Long Island Forum, June issue, signed by John Shell—Glen Head.

As to question No. 3; where is Springfield Dock? I have a post card marked Keppler's Hotel, Springfield Dock.

Springfield Dock was located at the head waters of Jamaica Bay. Another name familiar, was Meadowmere Park. Hook Creek went off from the head of the bay winding on northerly. I can remember a couple of hotels, on the south side of the Jamaica and Rockaway Turnpike, going across the headlands of Jamaica Bay. An electric trolley line operated along this turnpike between Jamaica and Far Rockaway. Wooden bridges carried traffic and trolleys across Hook, and Mott Creeks. This turnpike was not too far above the meadow lands at the time. The trolley line was operated by the Long Island Electric Railroad Co. This line was

acquired through his neat penmanship."

used by many of the inhabitants of Springfield Dock, Hook Creek and Meadowmere Park for going to Jamaica or Far Rockaway, before W. W. I. The trolley line ceased operating soon after W. W. I. The turnpike before the turn of the century was one of the two main roads to the Rockaways, the toll gate being at Cedarhurst.

The turnpike was raised with fill, widened, and now named Rockaway Boulevard. Idlewild Airport comes to the southerly side of Rockaway Boulevard.

My daughter-in-law, formerly Audrey Lisle, was born at Springfield Dock, and spent her early youth living there.

Lou Pearsall, Oceanside



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"Eaves-Dropping"

Reginald M. Webb

I SHOULD like to make known some facts heretofore unknown as well as combine them with other features known by a few, for the purpose of presenting a new look at a quaint old home in our midst, namely the home formerly owned by Mrs. Harriet C. Raynor, adjoining the Booth House Hotel property on the north, in the Village of Greenport. During the two hundred and thirty years of its existence the old house having had so many different owners has undergone so many different architectural changes that today the original builder would scarcely recognize it.

During the years of ownership by Mrs. Harriet Raynor, she always referred to her home as the Booth House Cottage. She had purchased the property in 1905 from the heirs of George H. Corwin, who had purchased it in 1867. For many years it was called the Corwin House (not to be confused with other homes owned by other related Corwin families in this area).

I have made a sketch of this old house, from an old photograph presented to me which was taken during the 1890's, while in possession of the Corwin heirs but unoccupied at that time. Prior to 1867, the house was owned by John Jerome and his granddaughters Arletta T. Clark and Cynthia M. Titsworth, Moses Griffing and John Milton Griffing who purchased it in 1836 from Henry K. Booth, whose sister Frances Booth and brother Victor had inherited the property from their mother Elizabeth Booth and their father Capt. Joseph Booth.

Capt. Joseph Booth had acquired the property from Capt. Orange Webb before 1800. I quote here excerpts from pages 52, 110 and 111 of the Griffin's Journal with inserted notes of my own. "Orange Webb, Sr., was an



The Booth Cottage Sketched from a Photo by the Author.

inn keeper, at what was called Sterling, for about forty years. It was in his inn that the celebrated George Whitfield, on a pane of glass with a diamond, wrote these memorable words, viz; 'One thing is needful.'

This pane of glass is yet entire (in 1857), although written on in 1763, having withstood unscathed, the storms of more than four score years. (The writer is informed that it is still preserved in the Long Island Historical Society quarters in Brooklyn.)

In Orange Webb's days there were but five or six dwelling houses at "that place near the landing, where was a wharf, to which vessels of fifty or eighty tons could come." (I have among my papers a receipted bill by Orange Webb in the amount of 8 pounds, 14 shillings and 5 pence for list of several items and the use of my wharf and store to a William Albertson, dated Sterling March 12, 1784.) "The wharf was at the mouth of the creek, adjoining the then Judge Thomas Youngs farm of some five hundred acres. He was some time concerned in the West India trade, in vessels of his own. The house and establishment which he owned and occupied, from 1770 to 1805,

was the property of Thomas Fanning from 1740 to 1770."

Orange Webb's children were, sons, 1st Thomas (above referred to); 2nd. John (who died in parts unknown); James died at home, July 12, 1795; 4th. Orange (for many years, was a merchant (above referred to) of New York, a man of very prepossessing address, a Christian in life and profession); 5th. David (Capt. David as before mentioned); 6th. Silas, born in 1768 and died on March 6th, 1849; and Daughters. 1. Fanny (married Capt. John Donachie, died Oct. 15, 1788; 2. Mary (Polly) married Capt. Elisha King who died about 1828; 3. Ann (Nancy) married Capt. David King."

For further proof of the antiquity of the Booth House Cottage, I relate following. In the year 1917, Mr. Edwin S. Conklin, a well known building contractor in this area for many years, had acquired the contract with Mrs. Harriet C. Raynor to remodel the Booth House Cottage. During the early stages of Mr. Conklin's preparation for the work, another building contractor was visiting Greenport from Washington, D. C. He inquired of the Chief of Police of the Village if there were any old houses in the area being torn down or re-

modeled. The Chief of Police suggested that he consult with Mr. Conklin while on the job. Arriving at the scene he explained to Mr. Conklin his interest in and knowledge of old colonial structures and that wherever he might be visiting he would seek for them and observe their graceful architecture. He further remarked that he was certain that this home was a very old one and on the basis of its type of construction there was a means of knowing the year in which the house was built. He then inquired of Mr. Conklin, "Are you by any chance going to break open the upper southwest mortice joint or eaves at that section?" Mr. Conklin replied, "Why yes, I have to, in order to raise the roof to build in dormers on the west side." The visiting contractor then said, "When you do—open that joint with care, because there you will find a coin locked in there bearing a date, which will be

the year that the house was erected."

Mr. Conklin assured his fellow contractor that he would remember his advice and with special care the upper southwest mortice joint was separated—and there to Mr. Conklin's amazement was a British Penny in fine condition, bearing the date 1731. The Washington contractor had also explained to Mr. Conklin that this was a custom at that time and for years after the Revolutionary War. Also, that later on and beyond the Civil War period the custom was to place to U.S. penny under the sill of the inner door of the front entry.

About fifteen years ago Mr. Conklin visited my home one evening to see my document collection and old Greenport records. As he entered the door he presented me with the British penny dated 1731 from the old Webb house to be placed with my collection and also he gave me the U.S.

penny dated 1854 which he had found under the inner door sill of the front entry of the home owned by my great-grandfather William Webb, Sr., when he was tearing it down on the lot to the rear of the Auditorium. It had been standing at the southeast corner of Main Street and Amity Street (now Central Avenue) and was removed to the rear lot when the Auditorium was built. Mr. Conklin told me of other items found during the process of remodeling the Booth House Cottage. Under the attic floors where they were working were several pieces of shaped flint used in the old flintlock pistols and guns and parts of the mechanism of the flintlock action as well. He presented me with a piece of the shaped flint.

Also there were hundreds of brass or gilded buttons from British soldier's uniforms. The buttons were fastened down and so arranged in crisscross diagonal patterns between the floor beams, but would crumble when attempt was made to pick them up. No doubt these pieces of flint and parts of the guns were hidden from the British soldiers and Tories who frequently would raid the homes in this area during the Revolutionary War period.

From Mather's "Refugees of 1776 from Long Island to Connecticut" page 621, we find that during one of these raids, Orange Webb's wife Frances Sandyforth Webb heard them coming. Pretending she was ill, she climbed

(Continued on page 186)

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Readers' Forum

Bellport Monorail

Years ago when I was a small boy I lived at Bellport. I remember the old Mono-Rail railway that ran from the highway down across the fields towards the water.

This single-track railway seemed to be suspended. Anyway it ran along on an overhead cable and one track on the ground upon which it rode along as I recall.

I understood that the inventor lived in Patchogue or somewhere near and I believe they tried to raise money to get it used generally but as far as I know they only got enough to build the pilot or test line. This was around the turn of the century.

I wonder if any of your readers could supply more details?

Herbert S. Hale
Town Historian
Oyster Bay

(Editor's Note) In the July 1939 issue of the Forum on page 15 is a letter from Leon C. Moore of Patchogue who described the "Bicycle Railroad" which was installed at East Patchogue in 1892 by the LIRR.

"It was a monorail type of car running on two wheels on a single track on the ground and with a guide rail constructed alongside by which the car was kept upright when not in motion or running slow. Its speed as I recall it was 60 miles per hour and the power was from storage batteries.

"... One Patchogue man who owned considerable property nearby, laid out streets, stuck in fire hydrants made of wood and



Harmon Payne's 1912 Packard Bus Which Covered The Quogue-Riverhead route.

planted to look like real ones and the boom was on. Folks flocked from all over the Island and the city and some of these folks who bought lots have never seen them since. Also some who bought stock are still waiting for dividends.

"Every Sunday the place was thronged with visitors and they rode to the bay and back and dug for the long green. Thar was gold in them yar hills but the only folks that got any were the stage drivers, boarding houses, restaurants and the man who sold real estate.

"... I don't recall just how long the car was in operation but it proved to be a colossal failure and it was transported away up

to the west of Long Island along the ocean beach..."

Is this the monorail you refer to, Mr. Hale?

Early Mail Route

Mr. Havens B. Overton,
Suffolk County Home, Yaphank,
Long Island

Dear Mr. Overton:

As an avid reader of the Long Island Forum I note your letter on page 139 of the issue June, 1961 regarding "Mail Men."

Permit me to urge that you refresh your memory regarding Herbert O'Come's carrying the mail from Quogue to Riverhead at ANY TIME.

About the turn of the century
(Continued on last page)

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Writing About Writing

JOHN STEINBECK has chosen Long Island as the locale for his new novel, "The Winter of Our Discontent," and he has written a fine book. The setting:

"New Baytown is a lovely place. Its harbor, once a great one, is sheltered from the northeast screamers by an offshore island. The village is strewn about a complex of inland waters fed by the tides, which at ebb and flow drive wild races through narrow channels from the harbor and sea. It is not a crowded or an urban town. Except for the great houses of long-gone whalers, the dwellings are small and neat, distributed among fine old trees, oaks of several kinds, maples and elms, hickory and some cypresses, but except for the old planted elms on the original streets, the native timber is largely oak.

There was a time when a few towns like New Baytown furnished the whale oil that lighted the Western World. Student lamps of Cambridge and Oxford drew fuel from this American outpost. And then petroleum rock

oil gushed out in Pennsylvania.

New Baytown sank into torpor. The snake of population crawling out from New York passed New Baytown by, leaving it to its memories."

Recently, John Steinbeck has had two pieces in HOLIDAY magazine concerning Sag Harbor where he spends time. New Baytown is not identified as Sag Harbor nor do we intend to publicly, but as we read the book we so identified it to ourselves privately.

The hero is forced into villainy by circumstance, by pressure of his friends and by his family who want better things; by the memory of his illustrious whaling ancestors. Ethan Allen Hawley is a likeable, decent, honest young man. He has long whimsical talks with a dog he meets each morning on his way to work—with the vegetables, meats and canned goods in the store where he works.

The story is real up to a point for us when Ethan, completely out of character, betrays his employer. Ethan's son also does a dishonest deed which is more understandable since his morals are modeled on adult behavior as mirrored in the newspapers. John Steinbeck again a social critic laying bare modern American decay of morality. Despite serious and tragic overtones our impressions of most of the book remain as happy ones. We liked the characters—there is much fine humor—in fact there's a bit of every aspect of modern small-town life in "The Winter of Our Discontent." Published by Viking.

"GOOD SHOOTING" by John W. Mackay is a detailed book

of instructions on the training of a hunting dog; the setting up of a shooting area and the providing of housing for both dogs and game.

Mr. Mackay's own training in the sport and the preparation for it came from his experiences in the Carolinas, Narragansett Bay and Gardiner's Island, which was leased by his father, Clarence H. Mackay, from the Gardiner family for many years. The Mackays also lived at Roslyn.

Though the book is written for specialist hobbyists, if two such

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words can go together, the section on the training of dogs could be most useful for any dog owner. There are explicit instructions for teaching a dog obedience which are universally valuable. There are many helpful illustrations and diagrams and we are glad to note that Mr. Mackay's instructions do not end with just shooting. He provides recipes for the cooking of pheasant, partridge and mallard.

GOOD SHOOTING is published by A. S. Barnes and Co.

THIS IS, among other things, an age of prose. Some three hundred years ago most everything was written in poetry; essays, plays, even medical and scientific treatises.

Every once in a while, however, we are very glad to get a collection of verses from a fellow Long Islander. Mrs. Gertrude Couch Crossman has written "Cold Spring Harbor—More Than" (Continued on next page)

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"HISTORY of Friends Academy" by Peter L. Van Santvoord. Only complete history of famous Quaker school at Locust Valley, founded by Gideon Frost, 1876. 36 pp., publ. 1956. Limited number of copies. \$2.00 postpaid. Address the author at 165 Landing Road, Glen Cove, N. Y.

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Writing About Writing

(Continued from page 185)

One Season" a well printed soft-bound booklet of lyrics many of which deal with Long Island



places and scenery. We particularly like "The Harbor Road". The best way to show what we mean is to quote it.

"The road winds down between the lakes—

A ribbon round the hills,
Threading the wooded valley
With white doorsills.

The lakes are linked like silver bowls

Spilling one from one,
Pouring the shining waters
To where the salt tides run.

The valley winds between the hills

Then opens wide to hold
A white church with a steeple
Slender and old.

The road curves round to hold the church—

Swings wide to hold the bay
And then the road runs up a hill
To go a city way."

There is nothing complicated about Mrs. Crossman's poetry—the words are ordinary ones put together easily—the pictures are clear and somehow clean. There is restfulness. Finally the road becomes alive to run—"a city way." The next time you drive from Huntington through Cold Spring Harbor and up the high hill just see if you too don't get a new experience from the trip after reading the poem.

The poetess writes of "The Great Oak at Lloyd Harbor," "North Shore, Long Island." There's humor too, on a mother's day in the summer toting children, interruptions of the Muse by family demands for dinner. A most enjoyable collection. MISS DOROTHY Horton McGee's fine article on "Raynham Hall" which first appeared in the Nassau County Historical Journal and was reviewed on these pages, has been reprinted with

illustrations by the Town of Oyster Bay.

We congratulate the town fathers for this project and urge other localities to do likewise when pertinent articles appear. THE HISTORY of a ship, "M.M. S. Culloden" giving the story of the British seventy-four gun warship from her building at Deptford in 1776 to her loss off Montauk in 1781 has been written by Frederick P. Schmitt, Forum author, and Donald E. Schmid, both members of the Club Sous-Marin of Long Island.

Included in the plates are a representative drawing of the "Culloden", a photograph of her last remains and a complete set of her plans. It is published by the Marine Historical Association of Mystic, Connecticut. C.J.M.

Eaves - Dropping

(Continued from page 182)

into bed taking a bolt of red calico with her which her husband had brought to her from one of his voyages to the West Indies (and verified to me by Mrs. Emma Beebe, in her late eighties, first cousin to my grandfather, as related to her many times by her grandmother Lydia Webb Latham). The raiders, seeing a portion of the cloth hanging from under the coverlets to the floor, grabbed it and pulled and pulled until they had yanked out the whole bolt. Frances came through unscathed, however, from the trying experience of that day.

Mr. Conklin later remarked that since all the attic floors

Bethpage Purchase

(Continued from page 172)

ness appealed to villagers used to dealing with the wooden-nutmeg Yankee. It is interesting to note that both George Fox and his follower, Thomas Powell, began life as herdboys and cobblers, with neither sticking to his last, and that they received a divided reception from the world in the one area where they were most closely conjoined—their faith. Certainly Thomas' rapid rise in Huntington can be directly attributed to his rigid ethical code. Reading the Bible, Barclay's *Apology*, and Fox's *Epistles*, sitting together with other Friends at the monthly meeting "in silence to wait upon the Lord," the young man shaped a direct and sincere character, respected by his neighbors.

We first hear of Thomas Powell in the Huntington Court Records of July 29, 1662, when at twenty-one years of age he gave testimony in writing that he had heard his master, Thomas Matthews, read from his account book "that particular touching the six pipes of wine and three hogsheads of rum" to Messrs Higbe and Wood

were not lifted only the west side of the house, we can but imagine what might still be hidden under the floors or in other secretive areas of the old house or other homes of that day.

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(Matthews' partners) and asked if it was well and one of them answered it was. "Living with my master almost nine years," continues young Thomas, "I never knew my master's books questioned in the least." This testimony may have been given in writing in accordance with a legal policy pursued in some colonies where lawyers were scarce, or because Thomas Powell had already joined the Quakers and was reluctant to appear in court and swear an oath.

A year later, at the age of twenty-two, Thomas Powell was made recorder for the Town of Huntington, an office he held off and on for twenty years. Later, when the English took possession of Long Island in 1665 and, under the Duke's Laws established at Hempstead, directed that a constable be elected every year out of the overseers from the previous year, Thomas Powell in 1667 at the age of twenty-six was chosen. In this office he carried the so-called "Broad Bill," a staff with the King's arms upon it, and, with the overseers, determined fencelines and highways, implemented the *Blue Laws* of the times and helped in general to keep the peace.

During this period Thomas, who had married (the records do not state to whom), bought from John Westcott a house along or near the cart path leading south from the harbor through the eastern part of the valley. The dwelling still stands in present-day Huntington near the corner of Park Avenue and Woodhull Street and is the oldest house in the town. Here were born Thomas II, Abigail, Elizabeth, John, Jonas, Caleb, Wait, and Elisha.

In 1664 Oyster Bay disputed Huntington's claim to three necks of land and part of a fourth. Governor Nicoll upheld Oyster Bay's claim to the fourth neck. Since the sagamore of eastern Long Island, Wyandanch, had sold Huntington to the first settlers for among other things "a great

fine looking glass," he now sent a brave, Chickono, who had marked the original boundaries of the purchase, to re-establish them. John Felcham (Ketcham), Thomas Brush and Thomas Powell were appointed to go along with Chickono, who, by the way, was the well-known Cockenoe-de-Long-Island, a distinguished interpreter, and a translator of scriptures. Tooker tells us that the name Chickono "arises from the Algonkian root *Kahkoo* or

Kehkoo, meaning *repeats what is said*."

Upon arriving at the South Meadows the party met some twenty Marsapeaque Indians who blocked their way and would not permit them to search for the marker tree. When the sachem of the Marsapeaques (probably Tackapausha) was shown the deed to which he had put his hand, he pointed out that he "was grieved to the heart at having sold the land" and that he had told Wyandanch so. After

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a while, however, he and his braves withdrew; the tree was found and the dispute resolved.

Huntington Town Records reveal that Thomas held many honorary posts and elective offices over the years. Along with others he was a trustee of the Freeholders of the Town of Huntington, and his name is among those on the patent which was issued in 1666. During that year he was also attorney for his old master, Thomas Matthews, in an Oyster Bay land sale to Joseph Ludlum. He continued as constable through 1669, was official surveyor in the establishment of land boundaries in 1670, was elected overseer in 1672 and served in this capacity for many years.

It is necessary to picture Powell's spiritual and home life at this time, if events which brought an end to his political career and precipitated his transference to the Bethpage Purchase are to be understood. A devout member of the Society of Friends in Powell's time disdained all music. He also spoke the "plain language" in which *thou, thee* and *thy* were used for the singular second person pronoun. Almost all pleasures were held suspect; dancing, for instance, was considered worldly. Even dress became significant of inner purity and restraint. Both men and women dressed in drab colors, their shoes free of such ornaments as silver buckles, which came into fashion during the late 1600's. Men, too, refused "hat honor" (lifting or tipping one's hat) to women or persons in authority; and Powell, no doubt, wore his hat indoors and out as was the custom. Even the days of the week or months of the year could not be called by name for such names were often rooted in the pagan past. Ordinal numbers were used instead. Most important, the devout Quaker *would not take an oath or swear allegiance*.

As early as 1676 Powell,



Horseback Riding At Bethpage State Park.

as a Quaker, refused to pay church taxes, although support of the Church of England was mandatory under British law. When in 1681 this unpaid tax totalled eight pounds, fifteen shillings, ten pence, Thomas was ordered by writ of the King to appear at Riverhead and "show cause why this sum should not be taken from him by force." The records fail to indicate whether or not the issue was ever finally settled. It is possible that his friends interposed in view of Powell's long record of public service. Anyway, in 1682, having become more rigid in his faith, Thomas refused the office of constable because it required an oath. Yet, once more, in 1684, Powell and others were sent by Huntington town to obtain a patent from Governor Nicoll; and, in 1686, Powell was appointed committeeman to go, as one of a group, to Southampton and there represent Huntington in a transaction of public business.

With these civic duties well performed and behind him, Powell, shortly after the death of his wife, began to dispose of his Huntington holdings. He may have been further prompted to move from the town by a final alignment with the standards of George Fox, that uncompromising founder of Quakerism.

Whatever his reason, we do know that he rode one day in 1687 beyond the West Hills and into a fertile land at the end of the Pine Plains, where there was ample water at Broad Spring and Round Pond, stands of oak, pepperridge and chestnut, wild berries of all kinds, abundant quail, deer and "vermin," as most small wild animals were then called. Here with 140 pounds sterling (his total wealth stood at 104 pounds in 1673 and at 233 pounds in 1683) he purchased from the Marsapeaque, Secatogue, and Matinecoc Indians a tract of land three and one-half miles wide (east and west) and five

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miles deep (north and south), extending from the Massata-yun stream on the west (Broad Hollow, Bethpage) to the Huntington (now Babylon) Town Line on the east; and from approximately Boundary Avenue (Plain-edge) to the West Hills (Manetto Hill Road).

Not until 1695 was the deed to this land executed. Powell meanwhile had named this property "Bethpage" because it mirrored the geographical position of the Biblical town of Bethphage (meaning "house of figs" — the fig being a symbol for success or achievement) which also lay between a Jericho and a Jerusalem. (Jerusalem was the name that Captain Seaman and Robert Jackson had given to their purchase of 1644, now Wantagh and Island Trees). Over the years, in fact as soon as 1699, deeds were mentioning Powell's lands as the "Bethpage Purchase" — pioneer spelling probably reflecting in this case the careless phonetics of Caroline speech in the colonies.

Prior to 1690 he built a house on what is now Hempstead Turnpike, in a spot sheltered from the north winds by a branch of the Manetto Hills which the glacier had put down. Here he brought Elizabeth Phillips of Jericho, his second wife, whom he married on the 2nd day of the 9th month 1690, at a meeting in the home of Edmond Titus of Westbury. Now, although almost fifty years of age, he began his second family of six girls—Hannah, Phebe, Rachel, Mercy, Sarah, and Amy — and one

boy, Solomon. His children numbered fifteen in all.

When his eldest son, Thomas, married in 1691, Thomas Senior, using hand-sawn beams and Tudor joinery, built a new home for himself which still stands on the east side of Merritt's Road. He then gave the original house to the new bride and groom. This homestead, known in recent years as the "Lawrence Farm," was destroyed in 1931.

Powell, taking time to explore his purchase, discovered that there was an as yet undeeded portion of land called the "Rim of the Woods"

between his holdings and Captain Seaman's plantation, and he arranged to buy this land from the Indians. Most of present-day Bethpage falls in this area.

As the years went by, Powell's large family proved helpful in cultivating the vast acreage of his holdings, but lack of fertilizer and improper methods of tillage kept the amount of planted ground to a minimum. Although to a degree isolated, the parents and children managed to attend the Westbury Meeting. Old Thomas also became a personal friend of Captain Seaman, late of the Pequot

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Indian Wars, and was named executor in Seaman's will. Powell was visited by well-known *Public Friends* such as Thomas Chalkley who recorded his stay at Bethpage (1698) in his journal printed by Benjamin Franklin. Chalkley also held meetings at the Powell home in 1704 and 1705.

During his lifetime Thomas Powell had at least one apprentice, a certain Thomas Whitson, formerly of Hempstead. In 1669 the master became the boy's guardian as well. Later, in 1700, Powell deeded one-third of all his Bethpage lands to Whitson. This transaction began the dissolution of the original plantation.

Thomas, now old, had seen his wilderness estate grow in fruitfulness from that early day when he sat upon the ground at Broad Spring with the Indians Maume, William Chopy, Sascenin, Rumppass, Seuruckcung, and Wamassum and arranged for its purchase. All but a few of his sons and daughters were married; his wife, we can assume, had died, for he went to live with a daughter in Westbury, maybe to be near the Meeting. In 1719-20 he made his will:

"Now being indifferent in health and of perfect memory . . . I do in the first place give and bequeath my soul to God my maker from whom I received mercy and hope and believe I ever shall as I keep in his fear and stand in his counsel . . . Secondly, I give my body to the earth from whence it was taken. . ."

And so to the earth his body was given in the 12th month, 28th day of the year 1721. He could not know that his progeny, including the famous movie actor, William Powell, would bear his name across America and into almost every state. And that a well-known park and two growing communities would one day take with pride the name Bethpage, finding in it something of the spirit and vitality of Thomas Powell, yeoman.

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Readers' Forum

(Continued from page 183)

my father, Harmon Phillips Payne, had a "Star Route" contract to transport the mail from Quogue station to Riverhead post office, and used a horse-drawn stage to carry the mail as well as passengers.

A "Star Route" contract was for four years, and was renewed by bidding and awarded to the lowest bidder, and this service was continued for about 16 years, or about 1916, during which time my father (in 1907) introduced the FIRST gasoline driven passenger "bus" by mounting a horse-drawn stage body on the chassis of a 1½ ton truck. In 1912 he purchased a new 2-ton PACKARD chassis and had a body built thereon by W. F. Morrel in Riverhead; this seated 20 passengers (lengthwise of the bus) the first motor-driven vehicle built in Suffolk County expressly to carry passengers for pay.

I do know that about 1910 Herbert O'Come purchased a motor

chassis of about two tons capacity and had a passenger body built thereon to carry about 20 people. I believe the name of the unit was "Plymouth" and I am sure that it was equipped with what was known at that time as a friction transmission, which was unique at that time and proved to be

impractical for trucks.

If you have any further data on Mr. O'Come I'd be glad to hear from you.

Joseph P. Payne
Quogue

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